

CIA/OER/S-07082-75 TRANSMITTAL OF MATERIALS ON PORTS OF BEN  
THUY JAN 75 SECRET 01 OF 01

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The Port of Ben Thuy

Ben Thuy, the port serving Vinh, is a coastal transshipment area of only local significance. Located two miles southeast of Vinh on the Song Ca River, the port is essentially a transshipment area used by small coastal vessels of around 500 DWT and barges averaging 100 DWT. Estimated capacity of the port at present, based on the operation of five coastal craft quays, is 500-600 tons a day. Capacity could be increased by repairing dismantled main pier -- destroyed since 1966 -- and removing the sunken North Vietnamese ship, the Doan Ket, near the pier. Prior to 1966, this pier could accommodate two ships of about 1,500 DWT.

Access to Ben Thuy is restricted by a sand bar across the mouth of the Song Ca and depth limitations in the river. Depending on tides, ships drawing 15 feet could enter Ben Thuy at high tide. Depth of river is also 15 feet near main wharf. Draft limitations of this magnitude restrict size of ships able to berth at Ben Thuy to 1,500 DWT. Constant dredging is necessary to keep depths in the river to around 15 feet.

To circumvent these restrictions, the North Vietnamese have been lightering cargo three miles off the mouth of the Song Ca at Hon Nieu Island. Depth of the water in this area is around 30 feet, allowing ships of up to 10,000-15,000 DWT to anchor. However, to date all we have seen near these islands are 3,000-5,000 DWT ships, mostly Chinese Hung Chi's. Food has been the most important cargo lightered in this area.

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Clearance from the port area at Ben Thuy is varied.

The port is served by Route 1A, a bituminous surfaced road with an estimated capacity of 1,000 tons per day during the wet season (May-September) and 2,000 tons per day during the dry season (October-March). Also, the Song Ca River is a major inland waterway serving the Panhandle. Extending NW towards Laos along Route 7, it is navigable upstream from Ben Thuy for 36 miles by barges drawing eight feet and for an additional 100 miles by smaller craft. By traversing the river this distance, watercraft could move supplies to within 40 miles of Laos. Finally, the port is rail served by a spur south of Vinh. Estimated capacity of this line is 960 tons a day.

Storage space at Ben Thuy is large for the nature of the port, but reflects the fact that Vinh is the operational terminus of the meter-gauge rail line south of Hanoi into the Panhandle. As of November 1974, approximately 80,000 square feet of covered warehouse space was available near Ben Thuy, most of which had been constructed over the past year. Additional temporary covered storage space is available in the transit sheds near the dismantled main wharf. The four new buildings representing the 80,000 square feet of covered storage are road served while the transit sheds are road and rail served.

Petroleum storage is about one and a half miles NNE of the main wharf on the Song Ca. Estimated capacity put at

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4,000 tons. This area was destroyed by bombing between 1964 and 1972, but has been restored. The petroleum storage area is tied into the North Vietnamese pipeline system which heads south of Vinh to Quang Khe and then splits, one segment heading south to the DMZ and another into Laos along Route 137. Estimated capacity of the pipeline is 5,500 tons a day.

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